

HIGH SIERRA USERS GROUP

JOURNAL

ATARI

AUG. 1987
RENO, NEV

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MEETINGS...

LOCATION & DATE: General meeting and ST Special Interest Group--Truckee Meadows Community College--Room 212; Truckee Meadows Community College SAT. AUG. 15--10 A.M.

ANNUAL DUES...

ANNUAL DUES are \$15.00. If you see a warning dot or notice on your label, please renew your membership by sending your dues to: HISUG; P. O. BOX 2152; SPARKS, NV. 89432. High Sierra Users Group is an independent organization for Atari Computer users in the Reno area.

NOTE: If you want to see this group continue, to develop its fine program library and to publish this newsletter...THEN PAY YOUR DUES PROMPTLY...Don't take these services for granted. Your dues are our only source of income, and we can't continue without them. SEND YOUR DUES IN NOW!

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

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NAME.....

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ARTICLES FOR THE JOURNAL...

Articles for the JOURNAL are always welcome. If you wish to submit them in printed form, please set your printer for a 3-1/2 inch wide column in condensed type face. However, as long as your copy is legible, even handwritten copy is O.K. Articles will be printed as space permits, and according to the editor's judgment of suitability. Letters to the Editor are also welcome. Please send material to: Italo Gavazzi; 825 Wilkinson Ave.; Reno NV 89502 by the tenth of the month for publication during that month.

EDITOR COMMENTS...

If you remember, I issued a warning that my computer enthusiasm was likely to wane during the summer months, what with all the other summer activities competing for attention. And it has come to pass as I predicted...at present it has about reached bottom on my list of priorities.

In one of the many newsletters which HISUG receives on an exchange basis, my eye caught this quote: "I don't see the need for user's groups. After all, the computer is a machine, like a toaster. You don't join a toaster user's group after you buy a toaster, do you?"

Well, upon reading that, I'll have to admit it brought a chuckle. Of course, I'm quoting out of context, and, although computers are machines, they are just a bit more complicated than toasters.

So...Why computer users' groups? One big reason is the lack of standardization in the industry--and the other is that hobbyists of any variety like to mingle with each other and to compare notes. Misery apparently loves company.

The main reason that I rushed to join this users' group was the very crummy manual that came with my 800XL. And then there was DOS 3, with a very explicit manual. But it

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didn't jibe with any of the existing Atari software. Fortunately, Chris Manson set me straight very quickly on that by letting me copy DOS 2.0. Then there was the availability of the HISUG library at Computer House. Since I was particularly interested in graphics, I had soon copied the club's graphic discs and was marvelling at the machine's fine graphics.

I wasn't exactly new to computers when I became an Atari owner, and I realized that buying a computer and a disc drive was really just the beginning. I already had a printer, fortunately. A computer without a printer is hardly worth having--this I had learned in a beginner's computer class.

Why am I hashing this over? Because I realize that there are many beginning Atari owners out there in the same boat that I was in when I acquired my machine. Every time a computer owner upgrades and sells his old machine, the buyer of that old machine becomes a new owner--and a potential member of a users' group. In fact, he probably would be better off if he were to join a users' group BEFORE BUYING a computer.

Each brand of computer has its own idiosyncracies--and its own "bugs", if you will. There is good software out there for all computers--and a lot of not-so-good software, also. This is also true for hardware--those neat little accessories that are needed to make your machine do its job a little better. This is where a Users Group can really help the beginning computerist. Certainly, we are in a much better position to be of real help than the retailer, salesman, or advertiser. WE HAVE NO FINANCIAL INTEREST involved. And we all, I presume, have had bad or disappointing experiences, which we would be glad to have the beginner avoid.

Some of these hopes and concerns are expressed in a letter by Sue Parks of 444 Kirman Avenue #E-11; Reno, NV 89502. Her letter is printed elsewhere in this issue--I print her address here so that any of you wishing to write her may do so. She is specifically interested in advice about buying a hard disk, modem, or 1 megabyte upgrade for her ST computer.



ATARI 800XL

8 BIT NEWS

ACTION! LANGUAGE...

Many of the finer programs that have appeared in the pages of ANTIC magazine have been written in the ACTION! language. This language is a product of Optimized Systems Software, which is well-known for its excellent Atari

software. Since this is one of the better products for the 8-bit Atari machines, the following summary of ACTION! is printed for your information. The original was written by Bill Turczynski in "The Sourcerer's Apprentice" Spring '87 issue. It is published by the Michigan Atari General Information Conference in Warren, Michigan.

ACTION! is a language for all 8-bit Atari computers. It was written by Clinton Parker and is marketed by Optimized Systems Software, Inc. or OSS for short. ACTION! is only available on ROM cartridge. It is a compiled language, as compared to BASIC, which uses an interpreter. Boiling that down, it means that an ACTION! program can run as much as 500 times faster than the same in BASIC. Its speed will allow you to do more complex things without being forced to write machine language routines in connection with BASIC. If you have a library of machine language routines, they can be used directly in your ACTION! programs, as long as they are short. Long routines are too much trouble to use.

The ACTION! system is made up of five different parts: Monitor, Editor, Language, Compiler, and Library. The Editor, as the name implies, is what you use to create a program and to make changes to it. The Editor also allows you to load and save your source code. The Language is of course the set of commands, which I will describe later. The Monitor is actually the controller of the ACTION! system. It can call up the Editor, Compiler, and DOS. It can also do a memory dump, give starting addresses of your routines, and set certain options. A source file in the Editor can be compiled, then run or compiled directly from disk. It is also able to compile and run with one command from disk too! If that is not enough, you can compile your file and save it to disk as a binary file that can be loaded from DOS. You must have the ACTION! cartridge installed because it needs routines from the ACTION! Library. The Library is a collection of routines written for your convenience--it includes routines like PEEK, POKE, PLOT, PRINT, OPEN, CLOSE, INPUT, OUTPUT, PUT, GET, etc.

The ACTION! language operates with fundamental data types, consisting of BYTE, CARD, and INT. The BYTE data type consists of a one byte unsigned number between 0 and 255. The CARD data type (short for CARDinal) consists of two-byte unsigned numbers between 0 and 65,535. A CARD is stored in the standard form for 6502 machines--the LSB, MSB form. The INT data type (short for INTeger) consists of two-byte signed numbers between -32768 and 32767. They are stored in the same format as the CARD numbers.

ACTION! supports three kinds of operators--arithmetic, bit-wise, and relational. Arithmetic operators are the same as those used in BASIC: + - * /. Bit-wise operators manipulate numbers in their binary form. Relational operators are also like those used in BASIC: = < > <>

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ACTION! makes use of structured statements. These are divided into two categories: conditional and looping. Three statements are of this type: IF, WHILE, and UNTIL, the last two being looping statements. The IF statement has two options: ELSE and ELSEIF. A conditional test would start with an IF and end with IF spelled backwards or FI.

Loops begin with DO and end with DO spelled backwards or OD. Besides WHILE and UNTIL, FOR is also used in looping statements. The FOR statement is used to repeat a loop a given number of times.

An ACTION! program is made up of Procedures and Functions. Procedures are used to group some statements together to accomplish a task. PROC is used to denote the start of a procedure and a RETURN denotes the end of a procedure. Functions are much like procedures, except that they return a value. FUNC is used to denote the start of a function. RETURN marks the end of a function, but with an arithmetic expression which is the value that you want returned.

ACTION! allows two types of variables, global and local. Global variables are ones that can be used anywhere in your program and are normally declared at the beginning of the program. Local variables can only be used in the PROC or FUNC in which they are declared.

There are three extended data types in ACTION!: Pointers, Arrays, and Records. Pointers contain a memory address, and so point to a memory location. You can change the value of a pointer and make it point to a new location. Arrays allow you to manipulate lists of variables by making each variable in the list accessible using only the array name and a subscript. The variables in the list must be of the same data type. Records are constructions which allow you to group together some pieces of information, which, although related in some way, are not of the same type. Records combine some of the more fundamental data types.

As with any new language, it takes some practice to learn its terms and rules. OSS also has an auxiliary program called the ACTION! Toolkit, which contains many routines already written for your use, as well as few sample programs for your study. The Toolkit also allows you to access the floating point routines, which ACTION! alone doesn't permit.

As noted, a chief advantage of this language is its speed. It has also gained considerable acceptance among programmers. This would indicate that it is a workable and well-designed language, and worth your consideration.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR...

Dear STS16 Editor,

I just finished reading the Letter to Editor by Cris Manson. I think she has some good points. I work nights and do not get off work until 3:00 a.m. Saturday morning. Its very difficult for me to get up early and make sense enough to attend a computer meeting at 10:00 a.m. I would very much like to be able to get together with other ST User's on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or even Saturday afternoons. I would like to see questions asked in the column and invite anyone with knowledge to answer those questions. As an alternative, I think having some sort of questionnaire on each member would be a great help. At least we'd have some place to look for help. Maybe a buddy system could be worked out in areas of interest. Two heads are better than one in almost any instance. What I am saying is that I am willing if we can only change the day from Saturday mornings. How about it?

I need information from users on best buys on a hard disk, a modem, and a 1 megabyte upgrade. I prefer personal hands-on information to that I receive in the stores. Every store in every area seems to have their own preferences and mostly those preferences seem to be rated on their ease of installation and not through any great research. I realize that most of the Atari stores are on a small scale budget and that they are not capable of rating everything on the market, but I have been extremely disappointed in some of the products that I have bought that have had no local support. I think the ST has been on the market long enough to weed out some of the junk.

I am particularly interested in business applications software. Most of the Atari business software seems to be cumbersome to use, but I did not buy the ST to play games. Because of the investment, this will probably be the last computer I buy in a lifetime and I think I should have every possible capability just in case software support goes down the tubes.

I bought DBMan as a relational database. It is compatible with DBase III, supposedly. So far, I have spent about \$100 on related books, but without the 1 megabyte upgrade its all garbage. I worked with DBase II on a 64K computer and never had this many problems.

I have subscribed to the ST User magazine out of Canada. It seems to be written in a logical, straight forward manner and appeals to me more than Start. It also keeps me aware of the Atari hardware and software being manufactured in Europe.

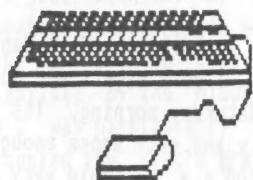
I enjoyed reading about someone else's problems in re-inking. I've had two jams and many black fingers and printer smudges...there has to be a better way.

Hopefully, we will find a way to get together.

Sue Parks

520ST

16 BIT NEWS



ST RAMBLING...

By Kenn Johnson

RAMBLE (ram'bel) To write or talk aimlessly or without sequence of ideas

At the next meeting of the STSIS we are going to determine the direction the group is going to run for the near future. If you want to have any input then come to the meeting and make yourself heard. If you want, call me at home before 9 P.M. Don't call after 9 P.M. if you can't stand abuse.

You can also call me at home if someone would like to take a copy of OSS PERSONAL PASCAL off my hands for \$50. Being the generous person that I am, I'll throw in the text, "Oh PASCAL".

Cimarron Computer is closing out all 8-bit software--go down and make a deal. They also have an Atari 801 printer they would like to sell.

New in our library is DBASIC. This program is very impressive, with speed to match anything available for the ST. It must be booted from its own disk as it bypasses TOS and GEM and loads its own operating system. Now you won't be able to complain about windows and slow speed. We have plenty copies of the program available with copyright labels. What we don't have are the manuals. These sell for \$39.95, but if you drop in at Cimarron Computers and show your membership card, you can get them for \$29.95. Let me tell you folks, this is a good deal if you like to program in Basic. Because it uses its own operating system, you can't make calls to GEM--we're talking Basic here. It does have statements for graphics and colors. Come to a meeting and ask for a demo to see if it meets your needs. Oh yes, this unique program comes from DTACK Grounded, Inc. in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

The new ROM'S are not even available to us poor original (saviors of ATARI) owners, and already the bug reports are showing up. This seems to be standard procedure anymore--correct some things that didn't work originally and mess up some that did. I won't worry about any of this until my ST has digested these vapor ROM's.

This one was downloaded from the GENIE ST product support roundtable. It's an answer from Mark White of Supra

Corporation on the speed of a hard drive, and is edited: "The ST has the fastest HD capability of any personal computer on the market today. Even the fastest current HD (18 msec seek, 1:1 RLL) is only operating at about 40% of the port's speed. Most of the hard drives on the ST are about the fastest for their memory capacity. Trying to determine how fast a drive will be on a system is difficult, as there are many different variables which will affect the speed, i.e. seek rate, interleave, recording method.

For SUPRA hard drives--20 MB 65 msec average, 1:1 MFM; 30 MB 60 msec average, 2:1 RLL; 60 MB 28 msec average, 2:1 RLL; 250 MB 18 msec average, 1:1 RLL. The most telling specs are the interleave, recording method. The various IBM's run interleaves of 3-6:1. What is funny is that in the latest BYTE MICROLINE, they talk about the new IBM's pushing hard drive manufacturers for speed."

I saw SUPRA's 250 MB drive at World of ATARI in June, and it is a fast sucker. I also use a (blush) IBM at work, and its hard drive is slowwww!!!!!!

MICHTRON has released a new product called TUNEUP. It is a disk optimizer, and probably will be of more use on a hard disk than a floppy. What happens--whenever you resave a file, it doesn't have to go to the same place on the disk it was accessed from--and in fact, it most likely won't. Over time, your files get scattered all over the disk, and the head has to keep moving around to get all the pieces. An optimizer gathers all the pieces and puts them together again. It will also put all the free memory in one place on the disk. I've ordered the program from Larry at Computer House, and when I get it I will try it on a couple of very slow partitions on my drive. I will let you know the results.

That's just about enough rambling for this month. If you have any ramblings of your own, give them to me and we'll get them in the Journal. Till next month--KENN.

IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN...

By Kenn Johnson

Let's first make a distinction between public domain software and shareware. Public domain software is released by the author without any restrictions on its use other than retaining the rights to it. You can use it and give it away, but you may not sell it. Some groups gather this type of software and sell it for the price of the disk and collection costs.

Shareware differs in that the author, instead of getting someone to distribute his software commercially, releases it into the public domain and requests donations from its users. In this way, he can receive some remuneration for his efforts. ARC program comes to mind as a good example. Following is a review of just such a program.

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Let me set the scenario. I have a text file that I need desperately, but every time I try to view it, my ST goes nuts. Since the file is not usable, do I just trash it? Remember, I need this file. Actually, the answer is quite simple--DCOPY Version 1.91.

Written by Ralph Walden of Eugene, OR, this utility has just about every feature you could need or want. Want to ARC or deARC files? DCOPY does this task with amazing speed. Maybe you just want to format a disk, or mark a file "Read Only" or "Read/Write". How would you like to hide or unhide a file? DCOPY also handles the mundane disk tasks--copy files, erase, directory, make folders, rename, and even duplicate disks. There are many more functions available in this program that I have not yet used or that I seldom use.

Remember the file I needed? Well, the file was written in 8 bit Atariwriter and DCOPY converted it to a readable 16 bit Atariwriter file, just by using the TYPE/CONVERT command--read it and saved it in its new format. DCOPY also allows you to go from 16 to 8 bit formats. You are also supposed to be able to print out the file, but I have not been able to get it to do so. Save it, and then print it from the desktop.

Sounds great, huh!!! But are there any problems? For me--no, but if you are expecting to be working in GEM with all its gadgets, sorry. DCOPY is totally command-driven, but that isn't as bad as it sounds. Earlier versions of the program used the file-select boxes and were very cumbersome. If you don't know about paths, extents, and wildcards--then you will either have to learn about them or miss out on a great utility.

DCOPY has become a standard on my drive, and I'm very enthusiastic about this program. Ralph Walden has earned his contributions. If you use it, send donations to keep him happy so he will continue to update it.

Incidentally, there is a version 2.0 of DCOPY floating around. Unfortunately, it's someone's idea of a joke, as it's only a retitled version 1.90. Version 1.91 is the latest, and newer versions come along, I will add them to our library.

Also in our library is a program of interest to hard disk owners. There is a bug in TOS (Surprised--Right?) that will allow only 40 folders be in a directory. If you get more than that, it can corrupt the directory and give you all kinds of weird things. FOLDRXXX.PR6 is a small program that goes into your AUTO folder and will allocate more memory for the directory. It will help prevent some of those weird things. Just replace the XXX in the program name with the number of extra folders you need. For example, FOLDR50.PR6 will give you an extra 50 folders.

By the way, if you are having trouble with those paths and wildcards, come to one of our meetings and ask us to explain them. That's what a users group is for.

A-CALC PRIME...

Cris Manson has already had some good words for the original A-CALC, and I'd like to make a start on an evaluation of the expanded version. Though I love numbers and formulae, I've never really worked in a business setting, am not an engineer, have never kept more than the most elementary accounts, and this is my first exposure to spreadsheets. Remember that. In what follows, I am trying to build on what is already stated in ANTIC's catalog section ad, so look there to begin with.

Of PRIME's many menus, four might be considered to carry the usual functions. The Fn menu has 17, Tr (Trig) has 15, Op (Operators) has 10, and Lo (Logical operators) has 10, which is 52 in all. 254 Macros in memory at one time are possible (such as your own statistical formulae), and are easily created, saved, selected, left out, modified.

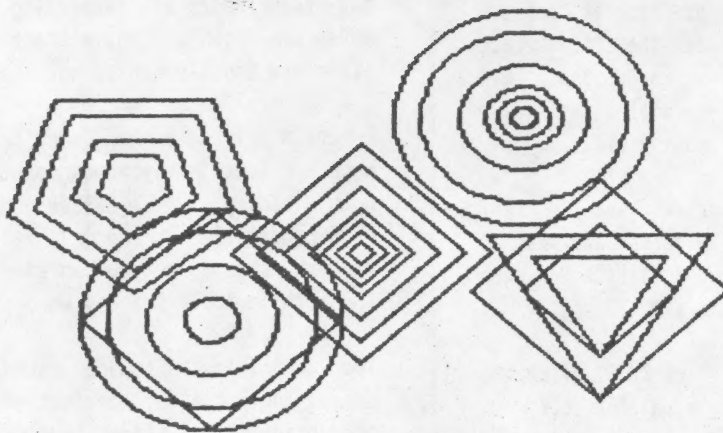
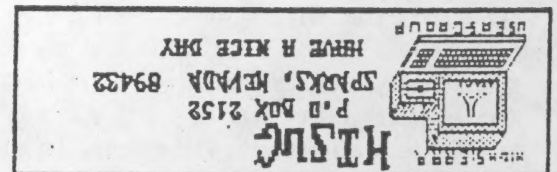
Scrolling, finding, goto-ing, selecting, copying, replicating, recalculating, deleting, inserting, altering, labeling, editing, sorting, and much else is very versatile and in every respect well implemented. Replicating an entire system of formula/data relationships in another part of the sheet may require a fairly simple algorithm, but the results are startling. All parameter-setting boxes are ingenious and attractive, and when the complexities are finally sorted out everything becomes fun.

Numerous printer escape codes can be entered in versatile ways and kept in any number of files that you select from upon loading PRIME. Sideways printing being for Epson FX80 compatibles is the only restriction. Report formatting seems good, or you can simply Disk print which saves the work in ASCII for any word processing program.

The manual is the typical rather complete, though condensed and not always perfectly clear, inexpensive ANTIC production. Great effort has been made to give you everything, and you are rescued in good time. The short tutorial only just barely got me started, though; I sent for the recommended books through our interlibrary loan system and received *Working Smart with Electronic Spreadsheets* by Timothy Barry. Most of PRIME's abilities were beyond me without this help, and it only taps a few.

ST INFORMER is supposed to have a spreadsheet comparison in the next issue, so I'll make some concluding comments after reading that. I had some trouble with the printer configuration, but ANTIC replied immediately: "send original in for version 2.09" (no charge). I am entranced by A-CALC PRIME, and can't wait to find a use for it! [Syd Allen]

J.A.C.G.
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